



PROVENIENCE DESIGNATION SYSTEM

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One of the most important aspects of archaeological field recovery is keeping track of where things come from and organizing materials and field records. The system of organization used at the Crow Canyon Archaeological Center is the **Provenience Designation system**, or **PD system**, in which every unit of space that is investigated in a site is assigned a sequential number (**PD number**) in the **Provenience Designation Catalog** and is described by a systematic set of provenience terms. The definition, description, and interpretation of each PD unit are recorded on a standard **Provenience Designation Form**. The location of each PD is defined by a set of provenience descriptors in the following categories:

Site Number

Study Unit Type and Number

Horizontal Subdivision

Vertical Subdivision

Feature Type and Number

Horizontal Subdivision

Vertical Subdivision

The PD system is a hierarchical set of locational concepts beginning with the site as the largest unit of investigation. The site is then divided into specific architectural or functional spaces. These large sampling areas or architectural blocks are numbered sequentially by hundreds (Arbitrary Unit 100, 200, 300, etc.). A **study unit** is a specific structure or area of investigation within a sampling area or architectural block, and each study unit is assigned a sequential number within the appropriate block of numbers (Structure 101, Nonstructure 102, Structure 201, etc.). Within the study units are **features** that may be investigated as built-in site furniture. Both the study units and the features are assigned consecutive numbers by study unit and may be divided horizontally and/or vertically in order to control the details of locational and associational contexts within the site. The PD system of hierarchically defining sites, study units, and features is an archaeological construct that organizes not only the materials and records from a site but even how we think about the site. The PD number normally applies to a very specific portion of a site, and all materials and samples that come from that space, as well as the notes, maps, photographs, and so forth that apply to it, bear the same PD number and systematic PD description.

In order to complete the Provenience Designation Form and understand the Provenience Designation system, one must use the standardized terms defined in this manual. The PD system is intended to be a precise way of organizing and describing locational information and of organizing materials and records, but it is also intended to be flexible enough to allow the archaeologist to excavate with the strategy he or she deems most appropriate on the basis of specific observations and the research questions being asked. Within this system, there may be more than one way to define a space. However, the structure of our research database restricts the options. The lab director and other field personnel should be consulted when questions arise.

Study Unit Types

If possible, divide the site into large sampling areas or architectural blocks and number these sequentially by hundreds (Arbitrary Unit 100, 200, 300, etc.). A study unit is a specific structure or area of investigation within a sampling area or architectural block, and each study unit is assigned a sequential number within the appropriate block of numbers (Structure 101, Nonstructure 102, Structure 201, etc.). In most cases, an excavation unit will begin at modern ground surface in an arbitrary unit. Exceptions would be where structure walls or midden deposits are visible at modern ground surface; in those cases, a study unit designation of "structure" or "nonstructure" could be assigned beginning at modern ground surface. Excavation units should not be coded as structures until excavation is below the tops of walls. A **Study**

Unit Catalog should be kept for each sampling area or architectural block. There are six study unit types, defined as follows:

1. A **structure** is a cultural unit where a space is bounded by three or more walls; it normally has a floor and evidence of a roof. It might be a room, a pit structure, a tower, etc. Features such as slab-lined pits and isolated walls are not considered structures, because they are either not enclosed or show no evidence of having been roofed.

2. A **nonstructure** is a cultural unit of space that is neither bounded by walls nor roofed but is interpreted as an exterior space within definable boundaries and is considered part of the site. This might be a plaza, courtyard, midden, or water-control device such as a checkdam, canal, impoundment, or reservoir. Nonstructure type will not be assigned on the PD form but will be entered into the database later.

3. An **arbitrary unit** is an excavation or surface collection area whose boundaries are arbitrarily defined, such as those of a sampling stratum or an architectural block and its associated kivas, middens, and courtyards.

4. A **general site** study unit type is assigned for material collected that cannot be assigned to any other study unit.

5. An **isolated find** designation is used only during site survey and is for an isolated artifact.

6. A study unit may be designated as **other** if it fits none of the above categories. Consult with the lab director before assigning this type.

Study Unit Horizontal

During excavation, it is often desirable to subdivide a study unit horizontally, and this may be done in a variety of ways. If a study unit is subdivided, each horizontal subdivision must be assigned a separate PD number. Every unit of investigated space in a site must be accounted for by one and only one PD number. The possible values that may be used as horizontal subdivisions of a study unit are listed and defined as follows:

Whole study unit. This indicates that the study unit was not divided horizontally. This code may also be used for a feature that was not divided horizontally.

Half. This indicates that the study unit was bisected and the PD applies only to the specified half of the structure, as identified by cardinal coordinates (e.g., east half, south half). The PD form must clearly identify how the study unit or feature was divided and whether the cardinal coordinates were defined by the grid or some other referent (such as structure axis).

Quadrant. This is similar to half, except that the study unit is divided into fourths, with a central point in the study unit forming a corner common to all four parts.

Grid unit. An arbitrary unit defined by site grid points and bounded by grid lines. For ease of identification in the database, *a grid unit should be used whenever possible* (unless the study unit is an entire structure, structure half, or structure quadrant). A grid unit is identified by its size, shape, and the grid coordinates of the corner nearest the origin point (0,0 point) of the grid—that is, the southwest corner of the unit. For a rectangular grid unit, always list the north-south dimension first. For example, “2-x-1 64N 95E” is a rectangular grid unit with its long axis north-south and its southwest corner at 64N 95E.

Segment. An arbitrary horizontal unit that is any shape and is not a half, quadrant, or grid square of the study unit or feature. The size, shape, and grid location of a segment must be defined on the PD form and shown on a plan map of the study unit. Use a grid unit instead of a segment whenever possible.

Wall. There may be times when one needs to record an object incorporated into a wall. Examples include mortar or plaster samples, architectural petroglyphs, and artifacts built into a wall. To do this, assign a PD to the specific wall, record or collect the items, and label them with this PD. It is important that the specific area of the wall thus designated be carefully described.

Study Unit Vertical

Each PD must have a vertical as well as a horizontal designation. Together these define the spatial limits of the PD. A number of options are available for describing the vertical component of a PD:

Stratum. This is a vertical designation whose limits are defined by stratigraphic boundaries.

Generally, a stratum represents a single depositional event or process caused by natural or human agents. *The beginning and ending elevations of a stratum MUST be recorded on the PD form.*

Level. This is a vertical designation whose upper and/or lower limits are defined arbitrarily. An example of this is an arbitrary 10-cm level of excavation. *The beginning and ending elevations of a level MUST be recorded on the PD form.*

Stratum-level. In some instances, it is useful to make arbitrary vertical divisions within a natural stratum. In these cases, the stratum number takes precedence and the level number follows a hyphen. For example, the roof fall of a structure might be defined as Stratum 3, and the supervisor might wish to divide the stratum arbitrarily. The upper roof fall might then be Stratum 3-1; the middle roof fall, Stratum 3-2; and the lower roof fall, Stratum 3-3. *The beginning and ending elevations of a stratum-level MUST be recorded on the PD form.*

Full cut. This refers to an excavation that cuts through the entire stratigraphic sequence of a study unit or feature. This designation is usually reserved for situations where it is either impossible to divide the study unit or feature vertically (e.g., a backhoe trench) or where divisions are not needed.

Surface contact only. Use this code for a prehistoric cultural surface, which may be either an interior floor or use surface or an exterior plaza, courtyard, or ground surface that has evidence of either prehistoric human use or intentional preparation. Artifacts and samples in PDs with this code should be point located. This code should not be used to indicate a stratigraphic break unless the break is also interpreted as a cultural surface. Extramural surface features (e.g., pits and “Wall: other” features) should be assigned to a nonstructure surface, even if that surface cannot be observed during excavation; the assumption is that pits and walls must have been dug into, or built upon, a surface.

Surface contact and 0 to *n* cm above. This designation is used to denote a surface and its inferred associated material. Many factors may affect whether materials that were associated with the use of a structure remain in direct contact with a surface at the time of excavation. This category allows the field archaeologist to associate materials with a surface even if they are not in direct contact with the surface. With this code, the archaeologist has the option of including any thickness above the surface that is appropriate. Artifacts and samples in PDs with this code should be point located. It is possible to give an individual surface two codes, one for contact only and another of 0 to *n* above surface. Two PD numbers are assigned in this case.

Modern ground surface (MGS). This indicates the existing, undisturbed ground surface and the loose, dusty sediment associated with it.

Mixed/disturbed context. This refers to a recent disturbance within a confined and definable context. Examples include profile cleanup and winter slump within a study unit. This designation does not apply to prehistorically mixed deposits.